

## A WAY BACK WHEN

by

HILDA TIEMANN KEEHN

10/8/71

I was born and reared in Liberty District, five miles north of Petaluma. It was a great day for us when my father would take my sister Edna and me with him to town. I had other sisters and one brother, we all had our turn to go to town. Incidentally, this trip was made with a horse and wagon.

My father would load the wagon in the morning with cases of eggs to be delivered to the Poultry Producers in east Petaluma. We left for town about 9:00 a.m. It took us about an hour to make the five miles to Petaluma. We had plenty of time to take in the sights along the way. Some of the farmers had trucks but there were still farmers with horse and wagons on the road. You would also see touring cars, the horses didn't mind the touring cars but at times they would shy when a truck with a heavy load came by.

I remember the black birds in flocks perched on the telephone wires and on the wires of the Petaluma and Santa Rosa Electric Car Line. They would fly away from the slightest noise, and then come back to their same position on the wires, chirping and warbling. I remember the poppies in bloom along the roadside and fields, there were so many then. When we came to the bridge over Willow Creek, on Stony Point Road, we would watch for the turtles. It was so much fun to watch the turtles dive off the banks into the water. I remember the beautiful homes along the way, one in particular was J. J. King's home. Gladys King, was my first grade teacher at Liberty School. We went to visit her one Sunday and I remember eating blackberries off the vines in the front yard. Now the home is neglected and the garden is no longer there. There is another large pretty home belonging to the Early family at that time. What is, now, Eagles Hall, was Cinibar School, which was the half-way mark to town. Coming into Petaluma, there is a creek that runs down from Cherry Valley, the Cherry Street area, it emptys into Petaluma Creek. There wasn't any culvert then where it crossed Main Street. When the tide came in, the water backed-up and there would be water in this indent in the street. This little creek was usually dry in the summer unless it were high tide; it was fun to ride through with the horse and wagon. As kids, we had our favorite homes on Main Street. There were two stained shingled bungalows with beautiful ferns in the front yard. One was later converted into a ice cream fountain - Chandlers - The other is painted white and is the home of Mr. Kynock.

Our first stop in town was at the Poultry Producers, we unloaded the eggs and picked up empty egg cases. From there we went to the Golden Eagle Milling Company on Washington Street and loaded-up with feed. They had ice water at the mill, in a dark little corner inside the mill, this was always a treat regardless of how cold or warm it was outdoors. From there we went to the hitching rail on Mary Street, next to Hill Plaza Park; then off to do our shopping.

Our grocer was Henry Nauert, he had his store on Main Street, about three shops up from the corner of Main and Washington Streets. I remember he always had a stalk of bananas hanging in the doorway, and a box of raw peanuts setting out in front. Henry Nauert would always give us peanuts, I loved eating the raw peanuts. Our next stop was the U. S. Bakery on Main Street, operated by a Mr. Sitlau. My father would order several loaves of french bread and a dozen butterhorns.



Frank Castagna, operated a butcher shop on Washington Street where the Bank of America is now located. Frank Castagna, was known to us as Uncle Frank; I never knew he wasn't really my uncle until I grew up. Uncle Frank always gave us a chunk of Baloney or a Frankfurter to eat while he waited on my father and they would chat awhile. The Baloney and Frankfurters tasted so much better then.

Occasionally, we would have to go to the hardware store, my father traded with Schluckebier Hardware. This store was about two shops above Hauert's Grocery on Main Street. I remember the elevator that went from the ground floor to the basement. A clerk would take us on the elevator, that was an extra special treat. The only thing I hated to see, was, when our horse had to back-up the wagon out of the hitching rail. This always frightened me because I was afraid of the horse slipping and falling. Although this never happened. I don't suppose this happened to anyone but it was my own little fear.

It would be around 5:00 p.m. about the time we arrived home. My mother could see us coming on Pepper Road, she would put on the coffee pot, coffee was ready by the time we reached the house. We each had a butterhorn with our coffee. After coffee it was time to gather the eggs. We always shared our day in town with the family. The kids were always anxious to hear what took place because they knew it would soon be their turn to go to town.

Our ranch is no longer a ranch; it is now the Liberty Golf Course.

Hilda Tiemann Keehn  
10/8/71



## FARMING IN THE LIBERTY DISTRICT

Hilda Tiemann Keehn

as told to Maxine Kortum Durney  
Petaluma, October 22, 1988

My father John H. Tiemann was born September 6 1873 in Hamburg, Germany; came to San Francisco in 1901. My mother, Amalie C Witt, was born September 16, 1877; came to San Francisco in 1899. They met in San Francisco and were married May 11, 1905.

At the time of the 1906 earthquake and fire they were living in the Mission District. After the devastation they decided to leave San Francisco.

Amalie's brother, Claus Witt, was doing well in the Liberty District of Petaluma. He owned three chicken ranches in addition to the home ranch.

John and Amalie left San Francisco in 1908, with the children, Alma and Rose. They rented a small ranch in Liberty District and did well.

In 1912 they bought a chicken ranch from Claus for \$4500. 14 acres. It had colony houses, a granary, barn, wagon shed, egg room and a five room residence. They built more colony houses and enlarged the residence as the family grew.

They had six more children: Ernest, Hilda, Edna, Hazel, Patricia and Ralph.

John became ill in 1924; passed away in 1926. Amalie died in 1972. Both are buried in Liberty Cemetery, not far from the ranch, where it all began.

The only original building left on the place is the family home. The ranch is now in four parcels, located on the corner of Center Lane and Pepper Road.

Every spring a batch of 1500 unsexed baby chicks were bought from the Pioneer Hatchery. The three brooder houses are at the rear; to right of brooder house is the egg room, wagon shed, and granary. And barn...for three cows and two horses. My father bought grain in bulk from Golden Eagle Milling Co. He mixed it with a hoe in a big trough. A lot of the farmers had mechanical mixers, but we didn't have one.

We bought clabbered milk, in barrels, from Golden Eagle to mix with the mash. And bran, as well. Mother made good bran bread from that bran.



They had between 4 and 5 thousand laying hens at all times.

The broody birds were placed for a few days in a chicken coop that can be seen in the photo between the heads of the two figures on the right. Then between the colony houses you can see little structures that we called nests, and this is where the chicken laid their eggs.

In the fall the hens were culled to make room for the pullets.

They didn't keep hens that long after they went to big houses and were put on lights at night, because the hens were burned out at an earlier age. We sent them to market. In colony houses we kept them for as long as three years.

Near our place was Liberty Station, the railroad track that carried the electric cars. At the station the track divided, with one line going to Santa Rosa, and the other to Two Rock.

The train went by at 3PM; that was a signal to the chickens; they all flocked to the gate to be fed. The routine was this: first we had our coffee, then the train came, then we fed the chickens and gathered the eggs.

On Sunday we went on the electric car to Sunday school, at the Congregational Church in Petaluma.

I was 14 when I went to work at the Poultry Producers, candling eggs. My father had died, and we moved to town in 1928. Dr. Peoples was on the Board of Education, and he was our family doctor. He knew the situation, and saw to it that I was excused from school. It didn't bother me, I was glad to have a job. My sister Rose was already working there, and she taught me candling.

Later I took the high school equivalency test...in the 1960's...went to Burbank College, and worked for the County, in the Social Services Department.



## CANDLING AT THE POULTRY PRODUCERS

Hilda Tiemann Keehn

as told to Maxine Kortum Durney  
Petaluma, July 17, 1989

I went to work in 1928 at the Poultry Producers. I was 14. My sister Rose worked there and she taught me how to candle eggs.

You had four eggs, two in each hand, and you rolled them before a light, looking for blood spots, broken shells (called blind checks that would show only when displayed before a light); and fifteen other categories. We were looking down at the light, which had a shade to protect our eyes when looking elsewhere than directly into it. We were standing on cement, with egg cases in front of and on each side of us. Some of the other 15 categories, or grades, were reds, blues, greens and medium greens, citys (air cell broken a little; these were eggs that went to San Francisco to the restaurants and bakers); browns, pee wees, jumbos, light dirties, extra dirties, medium dirties and heavy dirties. The blues were the lemon colored yolks, wanted by the New York market.

We candled a "lot" at one time, that is all the eggs brought in by one rancher. We wrote out tags for each lot indicating categories and number of eggs in a category. From these tags the rancher was paid.

We knew all the shipments by their cleanness. "Mudballs" came from range birds, in the wintertime. Fertile eggs had been produced for hatcheries, but came to us as extras. Always clean were the eggs from Rosenbloom and from Hayes, and from the Japanese. Germans, Danes and Sweeds all had good eggs. Eggs that came from the dairy ranches were not so clean, too little time to manage milking, keep the nests clean, and to clean the eggs.

Dirties went to the sanding machine, run by Carl Plow, and the real dirties went through a washer.

Every month they went through a case you'd put up to check your work. Henry Munson and Ed Schad were checkers. Fritz Boysen was our supervisor. Joe Luchsinger was a nailer, nailed the tops on the cases. Ted Kolkmeier, Verna Vogel and my sister Rose were inspectors.

There were about two hundred candlers, from 8 to 5, specially in the spring when the hens were laying heavily.

In the beginning when I went to work, we came at 10 minutes to eight, so we could have a coffee break. There was a cafeteria, with coffee and cake, and lunches at lunch time...mostly sandwiches and pie. Alice Thompson was the manager, as well as being one of the cooks.



When the law changed, in the 40's, we were given a ten minute break every two hours: one at 10 in the morning and one at 2 in the afternoon.

When the crash came in 1929 my wage was cut to 33.5 cents an hour. You had to do 16 cases a day to hold the job; and everything over that you were paid 5 cents a case. Some of us worked like dogs for that extra 5 cents. There were days when I could make four dollars.

The NRA (Roosevelt's National Recovery Act) meant that wages went up again.

At first I worked six days a week; then it went to five and a half days. Under Union control (Butcher's Union, AFL) we got five days a week, and the wages were not cut. This was 1935 or 1936.

We were piece workers, but the union wanted us to go off piece work, wanted to standardise, so every one was paid the same, whether they did 16 or 30 cases, which I could do. I said to Mr. Henderson, "I can work faster than the others and be done by three o'clock. May I go home then?" His response was "The cemetery is full of people like you". But we never did change...we stayed on piece work.

Men had done the candling before the women were hired, but it was found that women could candle faster so the men lost out. During the Depression this meant that the women had jobs, and in many cases, the men were at home to manage the poultry ranch.

My sister, Rose Tieman (Langdon) was the champion egg handler of the world. People in Europe had seen her picture, and came to see her.

Rose really knew her eggs. The Contest was held on Egg Day, about 1927, and her main opponents were Nora Rossi, and Letcher Cleveland (Crozier). Everyone had a chance. For winning she received some money, and Mr Bergstedt gave her a bouquet of paper roses, each rose with a cottony baby chick in its center. I really wanted one of those roses, but she had to give them back...something to do with the Chamber of Commerce...after the pictures were taken.



Petaluma Historical Museum  
Oral History Program

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PLACE

Petaluma

DATE

Oct 11 '90

Field Keen  
(Interviewee)

Maxine Dorney  
(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)



# PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

## Oral History Program

### Narrator Personal Information Questionnaire

Name Keehn, Neeka C. (Jermann)  
 Last First Middle (Maiden)

Address 3486 Spring Crk Dr.  
Santa Rosa, Ca. 95405

Marital status: Married \_\_\_\_\_ Single \_\_\_\_\_ Divorced \_\_\_\_\_ Widowed X

Birthdate 12/29/11 Birthplace Petaluma

Length of residence in Petaluma (or Sonoma County) since birth

Education: Elementary school Liberty School

Secondary school Petaluma Jr. Hi Grad \_\_\_\_\_

College Barbark Business College Grad \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation(s) or former occupations(s) Egg Candler, &  
clerk Typist for Sonoma Co Social  
Service

Travels Canada and other States

Organizations, clubs Redwood Garden Club, Native plant Socy  
Historical Society, & Social Singers

Other special interests \_\_\_\_\_

Additional comments \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU!



PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM  
 Oral History Program  
 Family History Questionnaire

|          | Name                    | Birthdate | Birthplace       | Deceased? Date |
|----------|-------------------------|-----------|------------------|----------------|
| Parents* | John H. Tiemann         | 9/17/1873 | Homburg, Germany |                |
|          | Emalie C (Witt) Tiemann | 9/16/1877 | Orschorn Germany |                |

Brothers & Sisters  
 Alma Bussmann (Rose Savdon deceased)  
 (Ernest deceased) Della Keen, Edna Todd  
 Hazel Jetch, Patricia Garced,  
 Ralph Tiemann.

Grand-parents\*  
 Albert & Catherine Fitt  
 August & Sophia Tiemann

Spouse  
 Harry Keen (Deceased)  
 Children  
 Patry Molinari  
 Gary Keen  
 Julie Monson

Grandchildren  
 Brian Molinari  
 Nicholas Keen

\*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU!